

RABIES VACCINE PROGRAM RECEIVES PRAISE FROM WV LEADERS

In conjunction with several federal and state agencies, West Virginia will now be part of a successful national program designed to reduce, if not eliminate, Raccoon Strain Rabies (RSR) as a threat to public and animal health. The Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) Program will airdrop small fishmeal baits with a vaccine packet to halt the westward movement of this contagious and potentially deadly disease of both humans and animals. Through the leadership of U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Wildlife Services is funding the \$1.9 million cost of the West Virginia phase of the ORV Program.

The airdrops are tentatively scheduled for September 10-21, and will occur over a 15-30 mile corridor down the center of the Mountain State, from Hancock County in the northern panhandle to Wyoming County in the southern coalfields. Other counties in the designated area include Boone, Braxton, Brooke, Calhoun, Clay, Doddridge, Fayette, Gilmer, Kanawha, Lewis, Marshall, Nicholas, Ohio, Pleasants, Raleigh, Ritchie, Roane, Tyler and Wetzel Counties.

The ORV Program is a cooperative effort among USDA/Wildlife Services, West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA), West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (WVDHHR), and West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR).

"The threat that rabies poses to human and animal safety has been on the rise in recent years. This vaccination program is an effective step toward meeting the health challenges posed by rabies. The combined efforts of the federal government and state agencies to combat this potentially fatal virus should have a positive impact on West Virginia residents, their pets, and state wildlife," Senator Byrd said.

Approximately 800,000 baits will be dropped by bright yellow "Twin Otter" planes from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. These aircraft have been used with the program in other states, and have been found to be quite effective.

"This same program has been used in Texas, New York, Florida and even in Europe with very positive results," said West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass. "Thanks to Senator Byrd, West Virginia can now be a part of the successful vaccination program. We've followed the westward progress of this disease and the time has come to take action against this strain of rabies, which threatens not only our wildlife population, but domestic animals and people as well."